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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/C AND PRM

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SUBJECT: RWANDA'S UNHCR CAMPS FACE RESETTLEMENT CHALLENGE

**¶11. SUMMARY:** The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) runs three refugee camps and three transit centers in Rwanda. The camps house Congolese and Burundian refugees, while the transit centers provide for Rwandans returning from neighboring countries. During recent visits to the UNHCR camps at Gikongoro and Kibuye, refugees expressed gratitude for the work of UNHCR, but also explained that the absence of viable options for leaving the camp, especially the slow process of resettlement, remained their greatest challenge. The United States has accepted many refugees for resettlement, but it is the Government of Rwanda's (GOR) delay in granting exit visas that presents the main hindrance to the resettlement option. END SUMMARY.

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THE UNHCR IN RWANDA  
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**¶12.** UNHCR, which began current operations in Rwanda in 1995, works with the Ministry for Local Government, Rural Development and Social Affairs (MINILOC); and it currently runs three refugee camps in the country. The Gikongoro camp is specifically for Burundian refugees, while both the Kibuye and Byumba camps are for Congolese refugees (primarily Banyarwanda Tutsis from North Kivu). The camps collectively hold close to 35,000 refugees and provide housing, health services, and educational opportunities. In addition to the refugee camps, UNHCR has three transit centers in Rwanda to reintegrate Rwandans returning from neighboring countries.

**¶13.** UNHCR offers three options for refugees to leave the camps: repatriation returns refugees back to their home country; integration finds space for them in their country of refuge (Rwanda); and resettlement relocates the refugee to a third country (usually the United States or Canada). As both the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Burundi remain conflict zones, repatriation is not a viable option. Considering the population density of Rwanda, integrating refugees into its land is unrealistic. Resettlement remains the only viable option, yet difficulties in the process have hindered its successful completion. Thus, many refugees remain in the UNHCR camps for extended periods.

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GIKONGORO CAMP  
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**¶14.** The UNHCR camp in Gikongoro houses approximately 750 Burundian refugees escaping Burundi's civil war. Many refugees escaped to Rwanda in 1972, while others have arrived post-1994. Emboff visited the Gikongoro camp on August 4 and met with the camp manager. The budget of the camp reflects its small size, and the camp seems to be struggling for resources. The camp lacks the implementing partner organizations that often provide additional services to UNHCR refugees, and most of its facilities suffer as a result.

**¶15.** The Gikongoro camp has a small, two-room dispensary staffed by two 'medical' employees, neither of them physicians. The dispensary lacks capacity to treat most illnesses, and thus refers most cases to hospitals outside the camp. The high altitude of the camp causes respiratory problems for many of the refugees. HIV/AIDS, the flu, eye problems, psychological issues, and intestinal illnesses resulting from the close living quarters also affect the camp residents.

**¶16.** Regarding education, the Gikongoro camp has its own facilities providing the first three years of primary education (P1-P3), with 132 children currently enrolled. These children study in small, one-room tents. One tent in the makeshift school is a storeroom, and was virtually empty during Poloff's visit. Teachers complain that the lack of books and other teaching materials presents the greatest challenge for them. Children attend a nearby Rwandan primary school for the latter half of their primary education (P4-P6), where 87 refugee students are currently enrolled. Currently, 42 Gikongoro refugees study outside the camp-site at Rwandan secondary schools. [COMMENT: It

is unclear whether all children have the opportunity to continue to local Rwandan schools or only a select number may do so. END COMMENT]. In addition to these educational opportunities, the Gikongoro camp offers basic computer training and is beginning a sewing program for its residents.

¶ 17. There are no televisions or other forms of entertainment available to the refugees, and they complain that there is nothing to do at the camp. The lack of job opportunities restricts their options of finding other ways to pass the time. Frustrated by the inability to return to their country, the impossibility of integrating in Rwanda, and the slow and limited process of resettlement, many refugees leave the camp in frustration.

¶ 18. Many refugees express gratitude for the work of UNHCR, and say that they get along with their Rwandan neighbors. Still, they express a desire to return home as soon as possible.

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KIBUYE CAMP  
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¶ 19. The UNHCR Kibuye camp is home to approximately 16,500 Congolese refugees mainly escaping the ongoing conflict in the eastern DRC. The camp, which was originally in Gisenyi province, now is situated in an isolated part of Kibuye province; and the refugees have few neighbors. The Kibuye camp has a number of implementing partner NGOs that improve the atmosphere for the refugees, including the American Refugee Committee (ARC), Africa Humanitarian Action (AHA), Jesuit Relief Services (JRS), and Right-to-Play. As a result, the Kibuye camp has better facilities than the Gikongoro camp.

¶ 10. The hospital at Kibuye camp consists of 3-4 buildings, including a maternity ward, and is equipped and managed by AHA. The hospital, staffed by an Ethiopian surgeon and many assistants, provides excellent healthcare for the refugees.

¶ 11. The Kibuye camp has on its grounds both a primary and secondary school, consisting of many small tents. In addition, a women's cooperative provides sewing opportunities for the women, while men learn shoemaking and carpentry.

¶ 12. The Kibuye camp also lacks televisions, but Right-to-Play provides sports, games, and life-skills for the refugees. The refugees' main complaints are that food rations are inadequate and the resettlement process is inefficient.

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THE RESETTLEMENT CHALLENGE  
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¶ 13. Budget restraints challenge both refugee camps and cause other problems to arise. The World Food Program (WFP) calculates food rations and, except for a two-month reduction earlier this year, has provided the standard package to all refugee camps. Still, refugees complain that the quantities are insufficient. They also comment that there are few opportunities to generate income and that other options to pass the time are nonexistent. But by far the greatest complaint is the lack of alternatives to staying at the refugee camp. Many refugees resent that repatriation is not an option and resettlement is an extremely slow process.

¶ 14. The resettlement process consists of a UNHCR interview and petition to a third-party country for resettlement, an interview conducted by the resettlement country, a medical examination, cultural lessons, and an exit visa granted by the current host country (Rwanda). It is the exit visa that presents the problem for many refugees looking to resettle.

¶ 15. Considering the small size of the Burundi camp in Gikongoro, UNHCR has attempted to resettle the entire camp. However, despite United States agreement to accept many of the refugees for resettlement, the Burundians remain in Rwanda. UNHCR officials explained that the GOR has delayed in granting their exit visas. Before clearing the visa, the GOR investigates the refugees' involvement in the 1994 Genocide, as thousands of Burundian Hutus fled to Rwanda in 1972 following heavy persecution in Burundi and were in-country during the Genocide. This investigative process has been very slow. UNHCR officials had hoped that the process would be faster for Burundians entering Rwanda after 1994, but this has not been the case.

¶ 16. UNHCR says that the GOR promised a reply by June on the status of the refugees' exit visas, but to date no reply has come. UNHCR explains that the Burundian refugees are

investigated by the GOR's National Security Service, and UNHCR is prevented from checking their progress. The Burundian refugees are supposed to be cleared on an individual basis, but thus far none of them have been granted exit visas. This hindrance has prevented all Burundian refugees from resettling elsewhere and is the cause for much of their frustration. Congolese refugees face fewer problems concerning resettlement--as most Congolese were not in Rwanda before 1994 and therefore are not believed to have participated in the Genocide--and many were resettled as recently as May.

O'LEARY